smartsheet

Automation in the Workplace 2017

Approximately 1,000 U.S. information workers were surveyed on behalf of Smartsheet by Market Cube in June 2017.
Respondents were drawn from a diverse range of industries, company sizes, and geographies.

Automation in the Workplace 2017

Executive Summary

There has been a lot of talk in the C-Suite and among IT managers about how automation can improve productivity and reduce costs. Missing from many of the conversations is how information workers view these changes, and the potential they see for automation to transform their jobs. By reducing the steps required to complete everyday tasks, automation can make information workers significantly more efficient and free up time to focus on higher-value work. But how much of their workday is actually spent on repetitive work? Which tasks would they most like to see automated, and how do information workers believe automation will affect their lives? Is it a threat or an opportunity?

The results of Smartsheet's groundbreaking State of Automation Survey provide unique insights into how information workers think about automation and how they spend their time at work. Despite potential job impacts, most workers said they were optimistic about how automation will affect them personally. They look forward to spending less time on repetitive tasks like data entry and creating reports, and more time on rewarding aspects of their work.

Automation's potential value to an organization is directly related to the amount of time workers are currently spending on repetitive tasks. More than 40% of respondents said they spend at least a quarter of their work week on manual, repetitive tasks, with email, data collection and data entry occupying the most time. Perhaps not surprisingly

then, an overwhelming majority of workers – 97% – believe automation can benefit their organization, primarily through increased productivity and reduced human error.

Information workers do have some concerns about automation, but they are generally positive about how it will impact them personally. For example, more than 60% of respondents said they believe automation will lead to higher unemployment generally, yet only a third are afraid for their own jobs. Most workers – 76% – said if their jobs were automated, they believe they would have the skills to find another job in their company. And a similar proportion believe automation will allow them to spend more time on the rewarding aspects of their work. Automation is coming, but information workers are ready to adapt.

Will Automation Really Kill Jobs?

Workers think other people's jobs will succumb to automation, but not their own.

Nearly a third of information workers – **33%** – think their own job could be replaced by automation, and **34%** think that automation would increase layoffs at their company. **60%** believe that automation will lead to higher levels of unemployment generally.

76% of information workers think that if their jobs were replaced by automation, they would have the skills to get another job at their company.

> ✓ **The public debate around automation often includes talk of its potential to eliminate jobs.** The reality is that, increasingly, businesses need to automate to stay competitive **–** and in the process, make their workers more efficient, and enable them to focus on higher value tasks that drive the business forward. Automation in the workplace is rapidly on the rise; businesses and workers must adapt or risk being left behind.

Automation is Here and Businesses are Ready

Information workers are already using automation on a daily basis.

65%

65% of workers use some type of automation in their day-to-day work.

68%

68% of workers said they work on a team or in a department that is actively taking steps to automate some of its daily work.

Of those workers not using automation already, **28%** said their department has plans to do so in the future – with **75%** of that group expecting it to happen within two years.

☑ **Businesses are adopting automation but are falling far short of realizing its full value - and therefore failing to capture significant potential gains in revenue, efficiency, innovation, and worker satisfaction.** What's needed is a strategic plan to implement automation to replace manual, repetitive tasks, freeing workers to focus on the work that matters most.

Employee Attitudes About Automation

Workers think automation will benefit their organizations.

86%

86% of respondents say automation in the workplace makes employees **more efficient and productive.**

78%

78% say automation will allow them to spend **more time on the interesting and rewarding aspects of their job.**

48%

48% say automation will **increase revenue.**

43%

43% say automation will lead to **greater innovation.**

40%
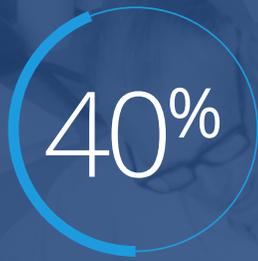
40% say automation will help their company be **more competitive.**

Automation's Impact In the Workplace

Information workers report spending a significant amount of time on manual, repetitive work, and believe automation will free up time and increase their value to the organization.

Reduce wasted time

69% say reducing wasted time is one of the main problems automation can address – the most frequently cited benefit.

Eliminate human error

66% say eliminating human error is one of the main problems automation can address – the second most-cited benefit.*

Recover lost hours

59% say they could save six or more hours a week if the repetitive aspects of their job were automated.

Become more efficient

80% think automation can help them be more efficient at their job.

Do more interesting work

78% say automation will allow them to focus on the more interesting and rewarding aspects of their jobs.

Do more valuable work

72% say they would use the time saved through automation to perform higher-value work.

*Employees could select multiple benefits

Workers spend more than a quarter of their time on repetitive, low-value tasks.
Implementing automation is critical for businesses that want to remain competitive.

Millennial Attitudes Towards Automation

A higher proportion of millennials say that automation is used in their workplace.

Millennials are more aware of automation, or they are more likely to work at companies that are early adopters of automation. Millennials are also more likely to be fearful of how automation will impact their value to the organization, and of its potential to cause unemployment.

STEPS TAKEN TOWARDS AUTOMATION

71%
58%

71% of information workers under 35 say their team or department has taken steps to automate part of its daily work, compared to **58%** of those over 55.

FEAR OF UNEMPLOYMENT

33%
18%
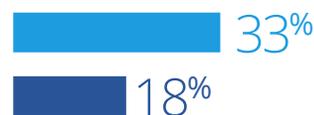
33% of information workers under 35 say that there is a high likelihood they'll be made unemployed as a result of automation, compared to **18%** of workers over 55.

AUTOMATED DATA COLLECTION

67%
57%

67% of information workers under 35 say they use automation for data collection, compared to **57%** of information workers over 55.

FEAR OF LOSS OF VALUE

43%
24%
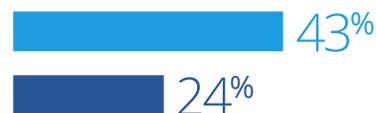
43% of information workers under 35 say that if parts of their job were automated, they fear they would lose value to their company, compared to **24%** of workers over 55.

Millennials have grown up on technology, and are likely to use it in all aspects of their lives. As such, it's not surprising that they assess the power of technology in general - and automation in particular - to be greater, and potentially more disruptive in their workplace, now, and in the future.

Conclusion

Automation is here, and it presents significant opportunities for companies to become more competitive and innovative. But businesses are falling far short of realizing the value of automation -- and therefore failing to capture significant potential gains in revenue, efficiency, innovation, and worker satisfaction. What's needed is a strategic plan to implement automation to replace manual, repetitive tasks, freeing workers to focus on the work that matters most.

Automation "can handle routine and repetitive tasks to free up employees for higher-value work that requires human judgement, investigation, and decision-making."

Employees report higher levels of job satisfaction when relieved of productivity-killing manual tasks. Though there are fears that automation has the potential to eliminate jobs, the reality is that businesses will automate to stay competitive -- and in the process, make their workers more efficient, more satisfied, and more able to contribute to higher business goals. Automation in the workplace is here; businesses and workers must adapt or risk being left behind.

Methodology

Approximately 1,000 U.S. information workers were surveyed on behalf of Smartsheet by Market Cube in June 2017. Respondents were drawn from a diverse range of industries, company sizes and geographies.

Sixty percent of respondents were from organizations of 1,000 or more employees.

Topics of the survey included how information workers are currently using automation, what their sentiments towards automation are, and how automation will impact jobs.

Information workers were defined as individuals over 18 years old who spend at least half their day at the computer and use at least one category of business software in their jobs on a regular basis.